



Representative Jim Buck

24th District



Serving Clallam • Jefferson • and Grays Harbor counties

January 2006

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Rep. Buck's legislative homepage:

<http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/buck.htm>

Committees:

- Natural Resources, Ecology and Parks
Ranking Republican Member
- Transportation

Resources on the Internet:

Access.wa.gov – Provides access to state agency services, including applying for unemployment benefits, renewing your car tabs, and much more.

Leg.wa.gov – Offers committee meeting schedules and nearly everything else you want to know about the Legislature.

SBA.gov and WSBDC.org – Sites that provide help in starting or operating a small business.

Dear Friends,

The Legislature convened Jan. 9 for a scheduled 60-day session that will be fast-paced and intense. Following the ceremonial first day and the governor's State of the State Address, we moved forward quickly on a wide variety of complex topics, with the job of fine-tuning the operating budget among the issues taking center stage.

The supplemental spending plan is meant to address unanticipated changes to the 2005-2007 budget. However, the proposal put forward by the governor would not only cover extra costs – such as rising prison populations and increases in school enrollments – but ratchets up spending another **\$504 million** on new programs or services.

As the session got under way, legislative Republicans advanced the **Commitment to Washington**, an 11-point agenda addressing specific policy priorities and reflecting many issues raised by citizens during a statewide series of town hall meetings. Included in the joint House-Senate agenda are proposals that would further clamp down on sex offenders, make health care more accessible and affordable, protect property rights, and help needy families by reducing energy costs.

I am also hopeful the Legislature will pass a constitutional amendment I have proposed that would protect homeowners by establishing an assessment cap, thus ensuring predictable and stable property taxes. If the bipartisan resolution wins approval in the House and Senate, the measure would go before the voters of Washington this fall.

If you have questions about the topics covered in this newsletter or other concerns to share with me, please call, send an e-mail or write a letter. It is an honor to serve you, and I welcome your ideas and opinions.

Sincerely,

Jim Buck
State Representative



2006 Session Preview



Rep. Jim Buck • *Serving the 24th District*

Buck proposal would bring predictability, stability to property taxes

Steadily increasing property taxes can be difficult for anyone: single-parent households, working families and especially older homeowners on fixed incomes. Legislation I introduced in December — the **Predictable Tax Amendment** — would put new limits on future property-tax increases and head off the market-driven spikes that squeeze already-tight family budgets. **House Joint Resolution 4214** proposes a constitutional amendment requiring a 1 percent annual cap on the increase in a home's assessed value.

A group of citizens from Sequim contacted me about placing a measure before the Legislature that would lead to predictable property taxes. Our conversations resulted in carefully crafted language aimed at ensuring all property owners would benefit equally and fairly. Most important, our proposal would provide homeowners **predictability and stability** in their tax bills so they are better able to budget and plan for the future.

Under **HJR 4214**, properties would keep their value at a specific point in time, except for new construction and new sales.

Cities, counties and other taxing authorities would be required to limit assessment increases to the rate of inflation — but no more than 1 percent a year — which would eliminate “spikes” and basically “freeze” a property's value. In other words, a homeowner would know with some certainty what to expect every year when the tax bill comes.

The bipartisan proposal, co-sponsored by Rep. Kessler, must pass both the House and Senate with a two-thirds majority. If it wins approval, it would be referred to

Washington voters as a ballot measure in November 2006. A simple majority would be required for it to become law.

It is important to note that the proposed amendment would not include a rollback of taxes.

Junior taxing districts have relied on the current constitutional wording to commit tax dollars to schools, fire, police and other public needs. If property taxes were rolled back to some point in the past, that



Rep. Buck makes a point during floor debate in the House chambers.

would mean taking away funding that is already committed to providing the services. Our goal in advancing the **Predictable Tax Amendment** is to provide property owners long-term and knowable valuation stability. We have no intention of disrupting the vital services citizens need and have a right to expect.

I also want to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of **Property Owners for Predictable Tax Now**, the Olympic Peninsula homeowners group that provided the impetus for the resolution, which was among the first measures filed for the 2006 legislative session.

Any constitutional amendment is a tough sell. Similar proposals have died before in Olympia. Our proposal will need a unified bipartisan coalition of citizens and their legislators to succeed.

A solution-oriented legislative agenda

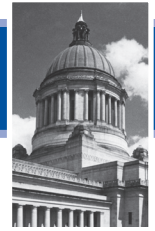
The Republican “**Commitment to Washington**” is a comprehensive 11-point legislative agenda for the 2006 session. The joint House-Senate plan offers specific legislation to aggressively address priority issues affecting the citizens of Washington. It comprises straightforward and doable priorities, and with the help and support of citizens who have shared their concerns and ideas with us, we'll make real progress on getting these proposals passed.

In many cases, there is agreement across party lines about the things we need to address, including tougher penalties for sex offenders, helping families with energy costs and affordable health care, stimulating job growth, ensuring students are meeting standards necessary for graduation and future success, and reining in the governor's and majority party's tax and spending habits.

Other elements of the **Commitment to Washington** include eliminating day-use fees at state parks, repealing the “death tax” enacted by the Legislature in 2005, and offering protections for property owners and farmers to prevent regulatory takings and infringement of water rights.

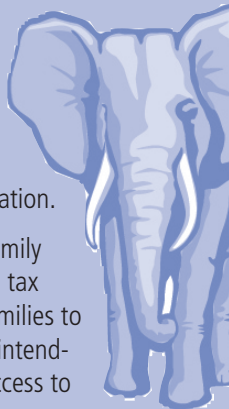
This is truly a citizen-driven agenda, and we are ready and willing to work with the majority party to accomplish the goals that the people of Washington have told us are most important to them.

2006 Session Preview



Republican Commitment to Washington

- Put government on a budget by restoring voter-approved tax and spending limits.
- Protect our kids from sex offenders by passing "Jessica's Law Plus."
- Give health care back to patients by allowing affordable, tailored choices that work best for them and their families.
- Get government out of the way of job growth by removing the regulatory burden on small business, repealing the death tax, and reforming unemployment insurance.
- Create safer neighborhoods through enhanced penalties for auto theft, identity theft and methamphetamine production.
- Welcome families to our state parks by eliminating the day use fee.
- Help every student achieve WASL standards and graduate on time by offering remedial classes, tutors, and expanded summer school programs.
- Assist needy families by reducing energy costs.
- Allow citizens and their elected representatives — not the courts — to decide the definition of marriage.
- Protect property rights and prevent government from taking property without compensation.
- Strengthen the family farm by providing tax relief, allowing families to use their land as intended, and ensure access to water.



Supplemental budget

The two-year budget adopted last year called for unnecessary tax increases and a 12 percent increase in spending — the largest increase in more than a decade. The governor's proposed supplemental budget aims to raise it even higher — **to a whopping 16.1 percent!** It's time to go back to the responsible budgeting process we followed in 2003. We refused to raise taxes, and by carefully prioritizing still provided help for the folks who needed it most.

This year, the most responsible thing to do would be to properly fund state pension obligations, create a constitutional rainy day fund, and put true tax and budget limitations back in place to protect taxpayers.

We support an approach that creates a sustainable, responsible budget, including:

- Restoring the voter-approved spending limit that the majority party abandoned last year.
- Repealing the "death tax," which gives the state a claim to a portion of a family's assets whenever they are passed from one generation to the next.
- Following the example set by former Gov. Gary Locke and former Sen. Dino Rossi which reflected the real "Priorities of Government."
- Maintaining a credible and meaningful emergency reserve fund.

Taxpayers deserve our best efforts to pass a supplemental budget that reflects leadership, restraint and responsibility.

Eliminating state park fees

The parking fee for day visits to Washington's state parks has been a source of aggravation to the people of our district since it was first imposed in 2003. The \$5 fee (or \$50 for a one-year parking pass) has generated more negative letters, calls and e-mails to my office than almost any other issue. The cost may seem small to some, but it can be a hardship on seniors, low-income families and others for whom state parks are a primary source of recreation. There also has been a drop-off in attendance at most parks. In fact, the fee has generated only about \$7.6 million, far short of the \$11 million that was expected during the last biennium.

I agree with park-goers who have complained that they feel like they are paying twice for park operations and maintenance — first through their state tax dollars and then through the additional parking fees. That's why I have introduced a bill (**HB 2616**) to not just reduce — **but abolish** — the fee paid by park visitors.



2006 Legislative Calendar



Monday, Jan. 9 — First day of session

Friday, Feb. 3 — The 26th day of session, and deadline for bills to be passed out of committees.

Tuesday, Feb. 7 — Deadline for bills to clear House fiscal committees

Tuesday, Feb. 14 — Deadline for House passage of bills originating in the House

Friday, February 24 — Deadline for passage of Senate bills by House committees

Monday, February 27 — Deadline to pass Senate bills out of fiscal committees

Friday, March 3 — Deadline to pass all bills out of both House and Senate chambers (5 p.m.)

Thursday, March 9 — The 60th day of the session. Legislature adjourns (*sine die*)

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Emergency preparedness

The staggering devastation caused by the earthquake and tsunami that hit Asia and east Africa in 2004 was a harsh reminder that a tsunami could happen here, too. Many Washingtonians also remember the tsunami triggered by the Alaska earthquake in 1964. It caused \$100 million in damage and took the lives of more than 100 Alaskans, plus four persons were killed on the Oregon coast and 13 in California.

Without question, our coastline is vulnerable. Although tsunamis take time to travel, coastal residents or visitors may have only a few minutes to a few hours to get to safer ground – and that assumes that they get the warning in time.

Gaps in the state's readiness will get a boost from a federal appropriation of \$500,000 for seven new tsunami warning sirens for installation in Grays Harbor and Pacific counties. Members of the Coastal Caucus also support a proposal in the governor's supplemental budget that would increase to 20 the number of NOAA Weather Radio All Hazard Alert broadcast stations.

It is also vitally important that individuals and families in our district prepare their own household emergency plans. That means a 'Go-Bag' for evacuation and in-home emergency supply kits comprising non-perishable food, water, medications, clothing, bedding and other personal supplies to sustain themselves for at least a week. Being prepared can mean all the difference between life and death in the event of a natural or man-made disaster.

While nothing approaching the destruction of the Indian Ocean quake has hit North America, the time to prepare is now. The Peninsula is vulnerable. We know a tsunami will hit the Washington coast. What we don't know is when.

Jim Buck State Representative

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1-800-635-9993

Legislative information on the

Internet: www.leg.wa.gov

State government

on the Internet: access.wa.gov

Election-year restrictions

As your state representative, I make every effort to keep you informed of what is happening in Olympia. However, this is an election year, and under the provisions of Initiative 134, I may send only two mailings during 2006 – this newsletter being the first.

The initiative **does allow** me to respond to your direct requests for information, but other in-district mailings are not allowed. I encourage you to write or call me whenever you have a question or a comment to share on legislation or other matters.

I also want to know if you have a problem dealing with state government. My legislative assistant and I are always ready to do everything we can to help.



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Representative



2006 Session Preview

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